



# 10 Steps to Mental Fitness

Just as exercise can improve your physical fitness, adopting some of the attitudes and behaviors below can improve your "mental fitness."

## 1. Get to Know Yourself

Socrates' suggestion to "know thyself" holds as true to today as it did in 5th century B.C. Athens. Learn to understand and be at peace with your goals, feelings and limitations. Whether it's keeping a journal or meditating, find some way of getting to know who you are, what you want, and what makes you happy. If you do, you'll be much better placed to take control of your life and any problems that face you.

## 2. Build Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence

It can be hard to do, but try to behave in ways that show that you care about yourself. Even if you don't always feel confident, use positive body language and present a positive attitude to the world. Your demeanor and dress affect how people interact with you. So showing high self-esteem and self-confidence will elicit respect in return.

## 3. Don't Overvalue Material Things

We all want to provide for our families, and working hard to achieve comfort and security is a laudable goal. But it's also important to keep balance in our lives. The pursuit of material goods is not the same as the pursuit of happiness. If the former has become more important than sharing time with loved ones, or enjoying the simple pleasures of life, you may want to reassess your priorities. Try to learn from someone whose work/life balance you admire, or talk to your family and friends about what really matters to them.

## 4. Seek out Positive People

Avoid "toxic" relationships that make you feel sad, angry or inadequate. It may be difficult, but you should minimize contact with people who bring you down, who always take and never give, or who constantly criticize you. Assess what they say honestly to see if it contains any nuggets of truth, but seek out more optimistic, positive relationships. If people consistently "push your buttons," then tell them to "push off."

## 5. Think Positively

Try to make full use of your abilities and build on your strengths. Cultivate your personal interests through reading or classes. Try new and interesting things, and take disappointments in stride. We all fail some of the time, but successful people learn from their disappointments and are not defeated by them. If you develop your good qualities and have a positive attitude, you really can transform negative situations into more positive ones.

## 6. Exercise, Exercise, Exercise

A balanced diet and some physical activity every day, whether it be a gentle stroll or a work out, will help relieve stress and keep your moods on an even keel. Exercise releases endorphins (producing feelings of well-being) and boosts the level of serotonin in your brain (which can help combat depression). And there are exercises for all moods. Stretching and yoga will release tension. More vigorous exercise can help with anger. Exercising outside provides a double benefit: sunlight can help to improve your mood and relieve depression.

## 7. Spend Some Time Alone

Being happy in your own company and having time for yourself, alone, is important for your mental well being. Don't depend entirely on others to add meaning and excitement to your life. Whether it's 20 minutes in the bath, listening to some music, or getting outdoors to enjoy nature, find some time when you can be happy on your own. If you find this hard, you may be socializing to avoid dealing with important issues.

## 8. Help Others and Let Them Help You

When personal problems seem overwhelming, responding to the needs of others can relieve anxieties and put your problems in perspective. Volunteering for a community project or helping a friend in need can also benefit you. If you remember to give as well as receive, you're more likely to grow a network of friends and family that will share your good times and help you through the bad ones.

## 9. Communicate

Express your feelings in a calm but clear way to your family, friends and colleagues. And listen with your full attention when they reply. Don't wait for the pressure of unexpressed feelings to build up. Catch the anger before it causes you stress and make your needs known without attacking others. If you have trouble expressing your feelings to others, work on your communication skills. Don't expect others to read your mind.

## 10. Seek Help When You Need It

Find people you can talk to when you have problems, and be willing to seek counseling if your worries seem overwhelming or if the intensity of your feelings does not diminish after sharing them with friends or family. If you feel consistently low, worthless or sad, seek professional help immediately.

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